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The Storymaker Wheel: An investigation into how teachers and pupils can use a counter-culture assessment tool to evaluate creative writing in the classroom

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Abstract

This paper outlines the processes of creating a 'Storymaker Wheel', a creativity evaluation tool conceptualised with input from a children's book author, a children's book illustrator, academics and teachers, for teachers and pupils to use to support and develop their creative writing. It documents the ways in which teachers and pupils engaged with the Wheel in three schools in England: a primary pupil referral unit, a primary school and a secondary school. Interviews with teachers and pupils about the Storymaker Wheel, and classroom observations of the Wheel in use, expose some challenges of teaching creative writing within the current English educational context, which we discuss.

KEYWORDS

accountability, continuing professional development, counter-culture, creativity, formative assessment, literacy, pedagogy, teachers

INTRODUCTION

Debates around different paradigms of writing in UK schools remain as prevalent today (Rosen, 2021) as they were in the seventies (Bullock, 1975). There exists a wrestling between writing as accurate, grammatically correct *product* and writing as imaginative,

student-centred, iterative creative, messy *process*, with the former currently (in 2021) more dominant in UK schools as discussed below. The latter, which for the purposes of this paper, we term 'creative writing' can, for reasons also discussed below, be easily marginalised, and there have been many projects established to enhance support for the teaching of this in schools in England. For example, The Mantel of the Expert (2018) and Arvon's 'Teachers as Writers' (2018). Zip-Zap is a creative social enterprise, whose vision is to support teachers to develop children's creative writing in schools.

The organisation is a Community Interest Company (CIC) that manages and delivers school-based projects to support children and young people to develop interest in and enjoyment of literary arts. Its remit resonates with some of the key ideas for 'what works' for teaching creative writing as mentioned in the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), and with a ''writing for pleasure' pedagogy' (Young, 2019) to include encouraging the teacher and children to identify as writers, engaging with professional authors and their processes, authentic writing activities including an authentic modelling of the writing process, fore-fronting dialogue and speaking activities to encourage imagination and oral rehearsal, allowing children time and space to develop their ideas in writing and using creative teaching approaches for building imagination (CLPE, 2018; Young, 2019).

Zip-Zap runs a number of key initiatives, working with collaborating schools (for a fee subsidised incrementally over three years). These schools are offered teachers' Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL), led by children's book authors and illustrators, so that they may develop their own identities as authors and, it is envisaged, their pedagogies for teaching creative writing. Zip-Zap also runs an annual conference for educators, to explore children's literature and illustration, and a Festival of classroom workshops run by writers and illustrators of children's books, which collaborating schools can buy into. The Festival is a two-week programme of workshops, which takes place across the whole school. Each class participates in a session delivered by a writer and/or illustrator of children's books, in which they might read or write stories, produce their own illustrations, design new characters, or create their own world of the story. The school also receives copies of the writer/illustrators' books in advance of the Festival, and can plan their own work and activities to tie in with the writer/illustrator sessions.

They organised a three-year project evaluation and as part of this, asked us to co-create, with authors, illustrators and teachers, a creativity assessment tool, later named the Storymaker Wheel, to support and encourage children to identify as authors whilst developing their understanding of the craft of writing and their confidence in peer—and self—assessing creative written work.

This paper recounts the process of co-designing and trialling the Storymaker Wheel and reflects upon the ways in which teachers and students in classrooms in three different education settings in the UK engaged with it. We start by exploring 'creative writing', and some of the challenges when seeking to assess it. We briefly reflect upon the position of creative writing in primary and secondary schools in England, before then going on to outline the methodology of co-creating, trialling and implementing the Storymaker Wheel. The ensuing data from our research, whilst limited, provides nonetheless an initial glimpse into some of the tensions and challenges teachers may face, when teaching creative writing in schools in England.

CREATIVE WRITING AND ITS ASSESSMENT

Any discussion about 'creative writing' is automatically entangled within the complexities of defining 'creativity' itself (Banaji et al., 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Glaveanu, 2017; Granger & Barnes, 2006; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010) and it is unsurprising that academics, teachers and curriculum designers cannot agree on what this might be. There is 'spectator'

writing, or what Bruyère and Pendergrass have termed 'authoring' (2020)—a free, creative, expressive, poetic and personal process, encompassing notions of voice, imagination, image, characterisation, story, originality. This is considered to be 'a time-consuming process, involving expanding ideas, reflection and revision' and one which contributes to the person's own development or 'personal growth' (Frawley, 2014, p. 18) as well as to their thought processes and understanding of the world (Bruyère & Pendergrass, 2020, p. 562). Then there is 'participant' writing, in which the structures and grammar of the language are what are important (Bullock, 1975; Dove, 2018; Morris & Sharplin, 2013). With this, the product is more significant than the creative process of writing (Bruyère & Pendergrass, 2020; Connolly & Burn, 2019). 'Little c' notions of 'creativity' as an everyday, democratic activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) lie at the core of our understanding of creativity in this paper. Craft's three strands of creativity in education as 'creative teaching', 'teaching for creativity' and 'creative learning' (2005, p. 44) are also relevant to our work with the Storymaker Wheel as a pedagogic, as well as evaluative tool. We understand 'creative writing' to be a student-centred, messy, process-led, exploratory, risk-taking activity, supportive of teacher and student personal growth and development, as reflected in Buryère and Pendergrass (2020) and Frawley's (2014) work. It has been noted that there is a dearth in literature exploring the kinds of creative writing that students produce and the ways in which creative writing is taught in schools (Connolly & Burn, 2019), although Bruyère and Pendergrass's work exploring early emergent, emergent, transitional, early fluent and fluent milieu when teaching students 'authoring' provides a useful heuristic for teachers and we return to this later.

There are a number of different assessment paradigms for assessing creativity more generally (Kaufman et al., 2012; Lucas et al., 2013) but no single model for assessment of creativity has been able to assert itself in educational settings. Lucas et al., (2013) launched a project in schools, with the aim of developing a creativity assessment tool for teachers to use with pupils aged 5–14 years. Exploring the concept of creative 'dispositions', they extended Caroline Redmond's three segmented 'Creativity Wheel' (2004, cited in Spencer et al., 2012) by fashioning an assessment tool as a wheel with five equal sections, each pertaining to a creative disposition or habit. Their five creativity habits were: inquisitive; persistent; imaginative; collaborative and disciplined, which they believed would maintain an emphasis on the 'learnability of creativity' (p. 100). Spencer et al. trialled their assessment tool with primary and secondary teachers and students in Science, English, Maths, Arts, Physical Education, Drama, Photography, Dance, Graphics, Religious Education and Technology lessons, and as a consequence, theirs was a tool for assessing creativity more generally within and across different subject areas and phases. Assessment was designed to be both formative and summative and to be incorporated into each school's data collection, reward and reporting systems. The notion of disciplines and the segmented, circular rather than linear shape, were taken forward from Spencer et al.'s assessment tool, to form a prototype for the Storymaker Wheel, as discussed below.

Assessing creativity in *creative writing*, presents a particular set of challenges, as educators, caught up in the lack of a clear understanding of what this might be, as touched on above, struggle to agree on those elements that make up a strong piece. Yet, it has been argued that this is necessary for English to be able to 'hold its own' as a subject (Weldon, 2009). Despite attempts to develop agreed success criteria and rubrics, there exists a consensus of opinion that this is inevitably down to the assessor's value judgements and that it is almost impossible for a piece of creative writing to be considered objectively and fairly, without complex 'analytical marking keys', outlining weighted assessment criteria, each with specific categories to 'develop a common understanding of standards' (Morris & Sharplin, 2013, p. 62). Notions such as 'voice' 'originality' 'memorable scene/event' are included in attempts to define what constitutes a strong piece of creative writing in summative assessment criteria, yet the 'common understanding of standards', proposed by Morris and Sharplin

(2013) remains elusive. Dove (2018) also suggests that a particular cultural capital is valued, as creative writers are tasked with demonstrating in their work 'an understanding of literary tradition', 'the ability to replicate or play with form', 'knowledge of the audience', which naturally privileges certain groups of students. Nonetheless, critics argue that it is possible to break down the component parts of any piece of creative writing and have proposed: originality and imagination; use of language; structure; expression of theme and maturity of style (Weldon, 2009), and image; characterisation; voice and story (Mozaffari, 2013), although the challenges with two assessors agreeing on the same understandings of these still abstract concepts remain. There is no universally or even nationally agreed set of success criteria or rubrics for assessing creative writing, as is evident when exploring success criteria in different General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE—national qualifications taken by 16-year olds in England and Wales) curricula.

The difficulty with knowing how to assess creativity combines with a 'tyranny of numbers' (Ball, 2015) in schools in England, where accountability agendas, rooted in assessment processes and practices, drive much of the work done, and, according to Ball, impact on teachers' sense of identity and agency. Accountability agendas have meant a squeeze on the offer of creative subjects, creative teaching and creative learning, as schools and teachers are less willing to take risks (Granger & Barnes, 2006) that may jeopardise their rankings in international/national league tables, that rely heavily upon success in Maths, Science, English and Humanities. The English National Curriculum (the framework for teaching students aged 5–16 years) reflects this. It does not feature the term 'creative writing' in any of its 264 pages. Instead writing is framed within the 'participant' paradigm (Bullock, 1975), focusing on *accuracy* in spelling, punctuation and grammar—considered by Mozaffari as 'irrelevant to creativity' in creative writing (2013, p. 2215).

METHODOLOGY OF DESIGNING, TRIALLING AND IMPLEMENTING THE STORYMAKER WHEEL

There were three cumulative phases for creating the Storymaker Wheel, and one implementation phase, each of which served to provide an opportunity to generate data around the key questions, listed below. *Phase one* involved collaborations between the children's book author and illustrator (who were employed by Zip-Zap to lead the CPDL sessions as well as working in Higher Education Institutions teaching creative writing and illustrating respectively), two researchers and two Zip-Zap employees as they came together in a room for a day. During the day, there were activities to discuss creative writing processes, and how these might be assessed. Data were generated through field notes which comprised researcher observations, and collaborative notes shared on flip-charts throughout the day. *Phase two* was a four-day residential course for participating educators, during which they had CPDL sessions on creative writing with the author and illustrator, and an opportunity to be introduced to, and explore and experiment with the first draft of the Storymaker Wheel. Here, three teachers (two primary and one secondary), one primary classroom assistant and one primary school librarian participated in semi-structured interviews about their teaching of creative writing in their respective educational contexts. The researchers also made observational notes and used thick description as these participants were introduced to the Storymaker Wheel and took part in a creative workshop, designing and sharing ideas for how they might adapt and develop the Wheel with their students, and for their creative writing lessons. *Phase three* consisted of emails with a Zip-Zap worker, who introduced the Storymaker Wheel to teachers who were interested in using the Wheel in the classroom. Emails were anonymised and copied to a word document for thematic analysis. The communications were coded according to a priori themes identified through the literature on the

assessment of creativity. *Phase four* involved visiting three schools, which were engaging with the Storymaker Wheel: one primary, one secondary and one pupil referral unit. We were keen to explore the following:

- How is the teacher working with the Storymaker Wheel?
- How are they referring to it? Language? In relation to students' work?
- How are children engaging with it?
- How are children referring to it? What language are they using? Are they familiar with it? Does it appear to be 'embedded' in their writing routines?
- How are children relating the Storymaker Wheel to their creative writing processes?
- What profile does the Storymaker Wheel have in the classroom? Referred to in exercise books? Wall displays?

During the implementation phase, we visited three case study schools. Here, we made observational notes of lessons involving the Storymaker Wheel and conducted semi-structured interviews with pupils and the class teacher. We also made observational notes and took photographs of classroom artefacts including posters, wall displays and student work. We gained ethical approval from the research institution as part of the planning process for the phases. Data from the different phases were also to be used for the Zip-Zap evaluation report which was to go to Zip-Zap's funders to prove good use of their financial support. There was therefore a particular intent to seek out examples of good practice for showcasing the ways in which students and teachers were working with the Storymaker Wheel.

Phase one

The first phase involved collaborative sharing of ideas about the processes involved in writing and illustrating stories, with author (Benjamin) and illustrator (Shima), two academics and two Zip-Zap employees. Key observations from Benjamin and Shima from their CPDL work and school visits were:

> the artist or illustrator comes into schools as a celebrity and this is not sustainable
>
> the writing and illustration need to be developed together so that art is not an after thought
>
> there is an issue with teacher confidence in their own writing—teachers are often scared
>
> A creative idea can be generated through writing and illustrating.
>
> A couple of teachers still draw and write for the love of it, but some are stuck, some want skills themselves and some just do everything.

When discussing the key processes when engaging with creative writing and illustrating processes, Benjamin and Shima came up with the following:

> Dispositions
>
> Voice

It needs to be ok to make mistakes

It is the process, not the product that is important and sketch books/visual diaries help to capture this.

Failure is important

Children need to develop an inner critic and resilience

A process wall is helpful.

After further discussion, the above ideas were refined and developed by all in the group into the following bullet-points, which were captured on flip-chart paper:

Resilience

Process

Failure

Fun/play

Unlearn/risk/fail/experiment

Voice

Understand creative process

Understand 'form' (reader, audience)

I am creative, we are creative

Own life is worth writing about

Developing habits

Frequency

Self starting

Feedback: giving/receiving

Enjoying and understanding the process

Working collaboratively

Finding language interesting and fun

Imagination

Creativity

Originality

Point of view

Writerly choices

Making myself uncomfortable

These statements, words and ideas were then analysed by the researchers for emerging themes and categories, which were crafted into the first draft of the Storymaker Wheel. It built upon Spencer et al.'s circular, five segmented Creativity Assessment Wheel (2012), developing and expanding their ideas for creative dispositions (imaginative, inquisitive, persistent, collaborative, disciplined) into five separate yet interconnected characters: connoisseur, inventor, explorer, artisan and philosopher. Each of the characters was devised to have distinctive ways of working in relation to creative writing. Collectively they were to encompass the processes of writing captured above. The connoisseur, for example, as someone who exercises expert judgement about an aesthetic practice is depicted as having an appreciation of a wide range of literatures, genres and media (*finding language interesting and fun*; *writerly choices*) and is a critically appreciative reader (*feedback giving/receiving*; *understand form—reader/audience*). The choice of characters was in itself a creative process, echoing the ways in which a writer might settle upon a fitting word in their creative piece. 'Connoisseur' may also have been 'critic', 'explorer' may have been 'adventurer', for example.

The Storymaker Wheel is designed to encourage students to reflect upon the different processes involved in writing/illustration and to provide them with a developmental framework to support them in pursuing and improving their own creative writing and story making. As such, it is a tool to be engaged with regularly so that it becomes embedded in students' ways of conceptualising and working with writing/illustration. It aims to provide enough guidance as a starting point for teachers, yet also enough flexibility that teachers can adapt and amend it to suit their and their students' ways of working and being in the classroom. We crafted the characters into a draft five-spoked wheel design and Storymaker Wheel poster with sample 'can do' statement sheets and then started developing a teachers' book to support these. An artist was commissioned to design a poster and draft worksheets to support the development of the Wheel.

Phase two

The Wheel was then introduced to a group of eight teachers and trialled during a four-day CPDL writing/illustrating residential, with the understanding that their feedback and ideas would be taken into the subsequent Storymaker Wheel, worksheets and teachers' book. We asked teachers to explore their current relationship to and with 'assessment' before explaining that with Freirean conscientization principles (1970) in mind, the Storymaker Wheel pedagogies were intended to encourage a particular relationship with assessment, likely to be different from those held by participating teachers. We were aiming for this to be a 'bottom up' dialogical process, rather than a top down, restrictive, 'banking' one (Freire, 1970). It was seeking to be counter-hegemonic, to disturb dominant school assessment processes and present ways of working differently and creatively with assessment. We imagined that the Storymaker Wheel would be part of a creative process itself: co-created by teachers/students; the five different characters explored and articulated by the students themselves; success criteria would be negotiated, using the students' own language; the design of it could be reinterpreted; its use would be discussed, agreed and owned by the students. This

was to emphasise a 'funds of knowledge' (Amante et al., 2005) approach to the Storymaker Wheel, with pupils articulating their understanding of the different characters in their own words, and having agency over how they engaged with it. Granger and Barnes' 'creative pedagogical stance' (2006, p. 5) was implicit within the ways of working with the Wheel—an inquisitive, adventurous, empowered approach to its possibilities was emphasised. The Wheel was conceptualised as a creative and creativity-inspiring artefact in and of itself, as well as a means for pupils to reflect upon and assess their own and their peers' creative writing and illustrating.

We wanted to model this process with teachers and gave them materials to play with (copies of the different character illustrations, different pictures of hats (to represent each character), sheets with lists of statements capturing the characters' habits, paper plates, coloured paper, scissors, glue) and encouraged them to devise a way of working with the Wheel with a particular class in mind. They then had time to play with this, before they shared their ideas for the Wheel with the wider group of teachers, giving them the opportunity to notice how other teachers were working with it and to share ideas.

Phase three

We then met with the Zip-Zap employee tasked with presenting the Storymaker Wheel to teachers during its forthcoming conference as we were, due to time constraints, unable to present it ourselves. We suggested that the exploratory workshop from phase two was a good model for introducing the Wheel to teachers so that they could gain an understanding of its underpinning principles, and have an opportunity to explore their own creativity, and share their ideas for using it. There was not time in the conference for this and instead the Zip-Zap employee presented the Storymaker Wheel via a 15-minute power-point lecture. They offered the incentive of a free Storymaker Wheel pack (to include posters, can-do statement sheets, hat stickers—hats representing the different characters—and draft teachers' book) to encourage teachers to engage with the next round of evaluation. Thirteen schools initially signed up for the pack, and we then gained a list from Zip-Zap of participating schools and teachers. We emailed all schools four weeks after the conference, to see whether/how they were engaging with the Wheel and then followed up, where teachers replied. Three schools emerged from our communications as schools that were engaging well with the Storymaker Wheel and seeking to embed it in their creative writing teaching.

Phase four

We visited the three schools and did observations in lessons, conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and took photos of artefacts in the school and classroom. The schools were: a primary pupil referral unit (school X), a primary school (school Y) and a secondary school (school Z). We visited each school once, spending a few hours in each, in order to capture the ways in which the Wheel was being used.

STORYMAKER DATA

Creative responses to the storymaker wheel

After initial enthusiasm from participating teachers at the Storymaker Wheel launch at Zip-Zap's annual conference, engagement was low. Seven schools within the sample of thirteen

did not respond to emails asking how they were getting on with the Wheel, indicating that they were not engaging with it at all.

One school response revealed the pressures of accountability in primary school life, as touched upon earlier (Ball, 2015), relating the lack of time for considering the Storymaker Wheel to the Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs):

> Please accept my apologies for not replying sooner. This has been a very busy term in school so far. In honesty my colleagues and I have not had much of a chance to try the story maker wheels in with our classes yet due to other things that have been in the diary and other school commitments (SATs etc...) However, we all really liked the concept and are really keen to use it in our classes.

There was also evidence that secondary school teachers needed more support and guidance in order to feel that the Wheel was for them:

> there were a lot of primary schools there (at Zip-Zap events) but not very many secondaries and the secondaries that were there, the colleagues I was chatting with were a bit 'how are we going to put it together, how will we use it as we work very differently from primary schools' (teacher interview, school Z).

Teachers from Schools X, Y and Z noted that the Wheel was helping their students to gain confidence with creative writing as it acknowledged and celebrated mistakes, drafting and crossings-out as part of the creative process, and provided different routes into the creative writing process:

> So we liked it when I talked about it to the other teachers here. Just mainly because a lot of the children we have either have an (Autistic Spectrum Disorders) ASD diagnosis or have ASD traits and so we quite liked the way it broke down story writing typically for ASD children is difficult because they tend not to have the imagination also lots of children we have, if not all of them are reluctant writers for a range of reasons, so I quite like the way it broke it down into different elements which they can probably all relate to in some aspects (teacher interview, school X).

> I liked the way it linked in quite a lot with growth mindset and how we can fail at different things and we can keep going and quite a lot of the language of some of the characters fits really nicely with that. So I think the children got on board because we use lots of language similar to that (teacher interview, school X).

Nonetheless, it is interesting that this teacher links the Wheel to growth mindset, a decision theory that has become popular in the classroom and is often pushed through School Development Plans. The term has become shorthand for any activities in school that focus on developing pupils' 'resilience' and 'attitudes to learning'. In this instance, the teacher is focusing less on how the Wheel might be a useful tool in and of itself, and more on how it can contribute to achieving other, pre-determined pedagogical and policy-driven initiatives already in play. This suggests the need to fit the Wheel in with other priorities and cultures already in existence in the classroom, and perhaps indicates a lack of teacher autonomy as suggested by Ball and Junemann (2012) and Granger and Barnes (2006).

There is evidence of some creativity in how the Wheel had been personalised by individuals and was being used. However, the majority was teacher-led and followed traditional models of Assessment for Learning. For example, in school Y, the students made their own

mini wheels, with a moveable arrow, for evaluating the particular disposition (s) involved in their writing that day.

(student mini wheel, school Y)

Schools X and Z had mini 'can do' statement sheets for their pupils to collect and put alongside their writing/illustrating, to encourage them to think about dispositions as they worked. These were the sample ones that were sent out with the initial Storymaker Wheel resources to schools rather than co-constructed student/teacher negotiated ones.

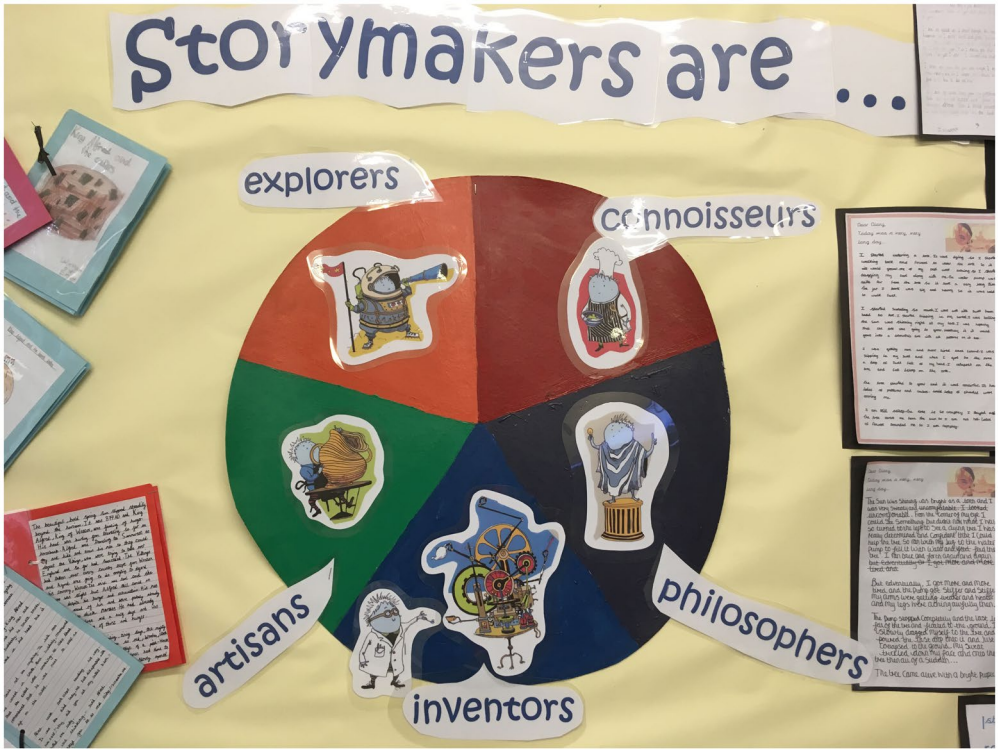
(mini can-do statement sheets, schools X and Z)

The characters were used as rewards and prizes:

> So what we've done is to split it into like cheese segments or puzzle pieces that you put together to make the wheel, so what the children have to do is collect in their writing they demonstrate different aspects of writing and then they collect the characters, and then when they get so many, they get a piece of the wheel.

and featured in classroom displays:

(classroom display, school X)



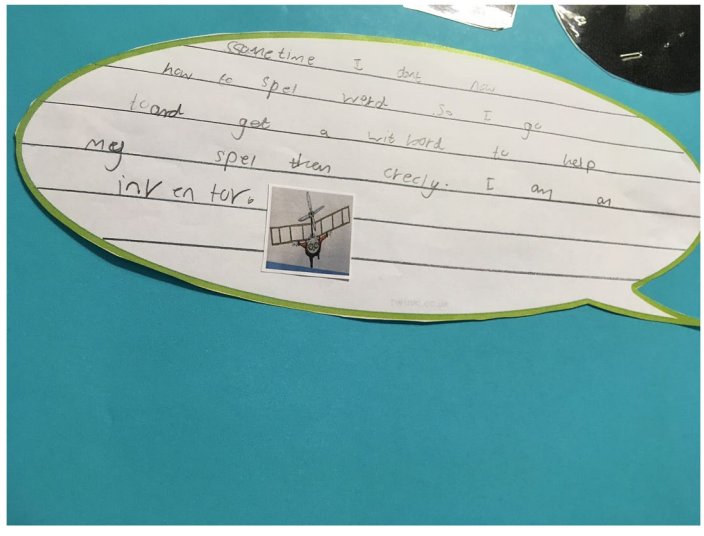
(classroom display, school Y)

The secondary school teacher interviewed for this research envisaged using the dispositions as lenses for exploring a literary text and conceptualised the Wheel as a material for supporting, rather than being separate from, her GCSE-focused lessons.

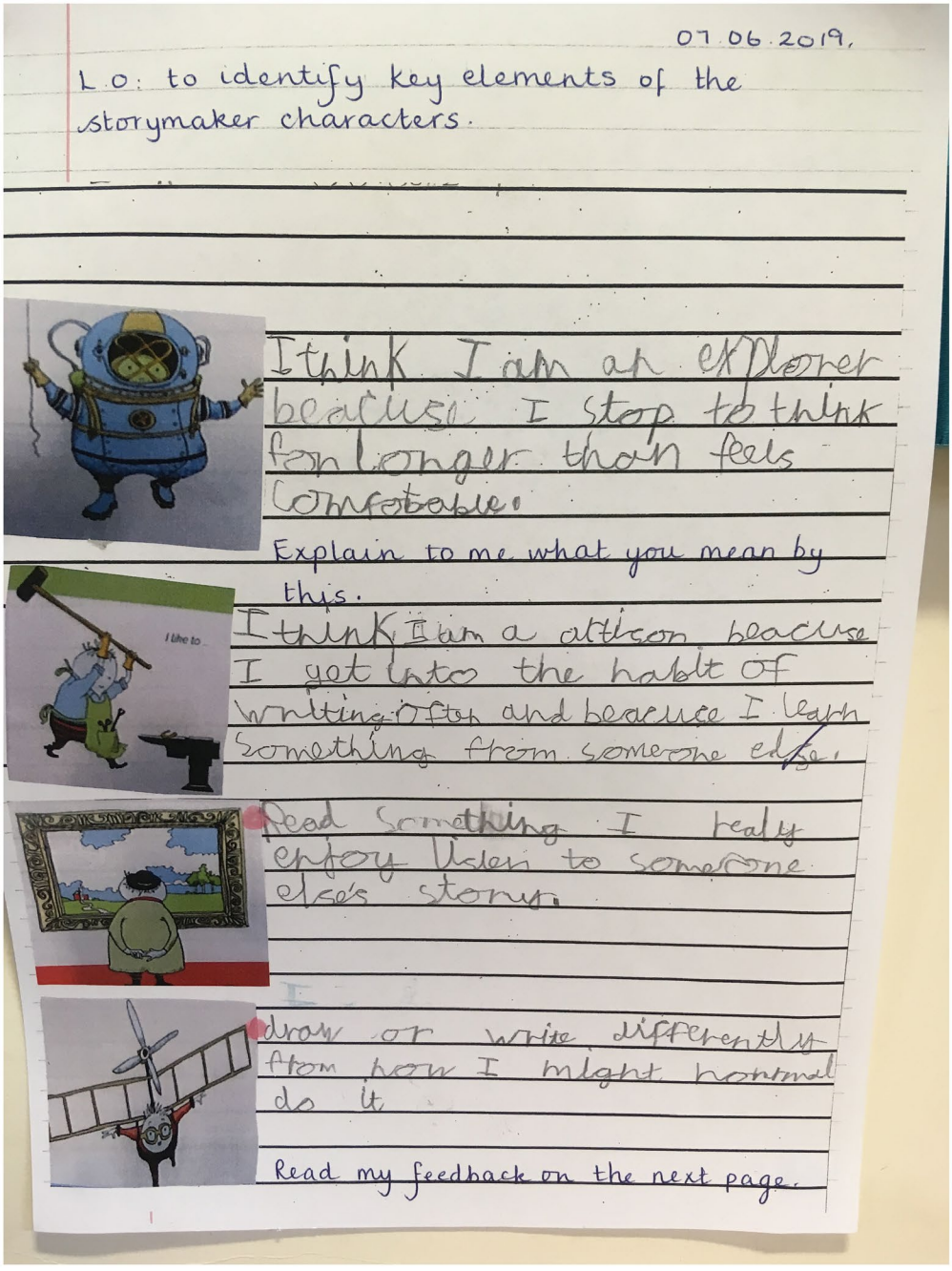
> …it lends itself to them encouraging the analysis of an actual writer cos then, they're having to say 'I can see they've been really creative and brave with their sentence structure …they've been really influential or inspired by this particular thing/writer, so it gives them that specific focus, which encourages them again, in the same way it did today, it encourages them to be more analytical about a piece of writing if they've got something specific to look at, rather than the same 'what can you tell me about the language', 'what can you tell me about the sentence structures'. And it's all much more creative. We do and I have done, said, 'right, you guys there, you can look at sentences, you guys are going to look at the structure, you guys are going to look at the character' but it all becomes then a bit formulaic, it's a bit dull. So actually by saying 'you guys are going to be the artisans', particularly for KS3, it gives them that bit more creativity, so it still feels fun and it still is fun, but actually, the academic learning is still in there, which we obviously need to make sure is still there, ready for GCSE (teacher interview, school Z).

Pupil-led examples of learners engaging with the concepts of the dispositions arose. One (secondary) teacher set up an activity in which pupils needed to look up the different dispositions in a dictionary, put them in their own words and then reflect on what these might mean in relation to their own writing. She drew on examples from work that they had done as a class, to illustrate and exemplify what each disposition might look like. This teacher then went on to organise the pupils into collaborative creative writing groups, in which each group member was a character and had to bring in the disposition-specific focus to their contribution.

Another teacher, who had attended the Storymaker Wheel introductory session appeared to have negotiated the language and the meaning/relevance of the dispositions with her pupils. Students with little confidence in their writing showed that they could relate to the characters and could see what the different personalities meant for their own creative writing:



(student display work, school X)



(student display work, school X)

The primary school teachers had not yet negotiated 'can do' statements with their pupils, drawing on their pupils' own articulations of the different dispositions, although discussions with the teachers indicated that they would do this with their students, but hadn't realised that they had the flexibility and freedom to do so, as explored below.

ISSUES IN EMBEDDING THE STORYMAKER WHEEL IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

The importance of introducing the Wheel in a manner reflective of its ethos, and for teachers to engage with an exploratory, creative introductory session became evident in ensuing discussions with teachers:

> Having missed the training I am going simply from the resources I have been sent - the poster pdfs and the evaluation of 2017. I am aiming to introduce the concepts tomorrow, going in-depth with the vocabulary, with a 'class' wheel and individual resources for children to identify the skills they are using in each writing opportunity. I would be very grateful for any ideas or resources you may have, in particular in breaking down the vocabulary used (it will be mostly new to this cohort, and relating it to their writing will take time, I think) (teacher email, school Y).

The Storymaker Wheel is designed to encourage teachers and students to see that the different dispositions involved in writing/illustration are not actually stand-alone, but instead, interconnected and again, this is something that needed to be explored and explained more clearly as the Wheel was introduced. Once this had been discussed with one of the teachers, she could see the potential for introducing the Wheel to her Key Stage 4 (14–16 year old) pupils.

> In which case, if it's malleable and fluid, then I would totally look at how I could tweak it for a Key Stage 4 group (teacher interview, school Z).

Teachers noted the 'sophisticated' language in the Wheel and had suggestions for encouraging their students to embrace words such as 'artisan' and 'connoisseur':

> For me, the language, some of them found it quite difficult to understand, so we had to do … for some of the younger ones, but they liked the pictures so I'd say that that's one thing I would think even better if. Some of the language. Lots of new words. So there were quite a lot of new words which took us quite a long time to explain. But once they'd got their heads round it, and actually the older ones were very good at helping the younger ones, some of the language choices, sometimes it can be a bit tricky. I think actually even if the language, perhaps if the characters had a speech bubble that explained WHY they were an artisan, so 'I am an artisan because'. That would then help our children to say 'we can do that, too', that might be a way for them to access the language (teacher interview, school X).

> The whole vocabulary is so advanced for them, it's just getting used to what that means to them so they know .. we've said a connoisseur is an expert and a philosopher is a thinker .. it's got great vocabulary in it as well (teacher interview, school Y),

One teacher was keen to bring in the new language of 'philosopher' but ended up tying it to more prescriptive notions of 'creative writing' reliant on the technical mechanics of grammar:

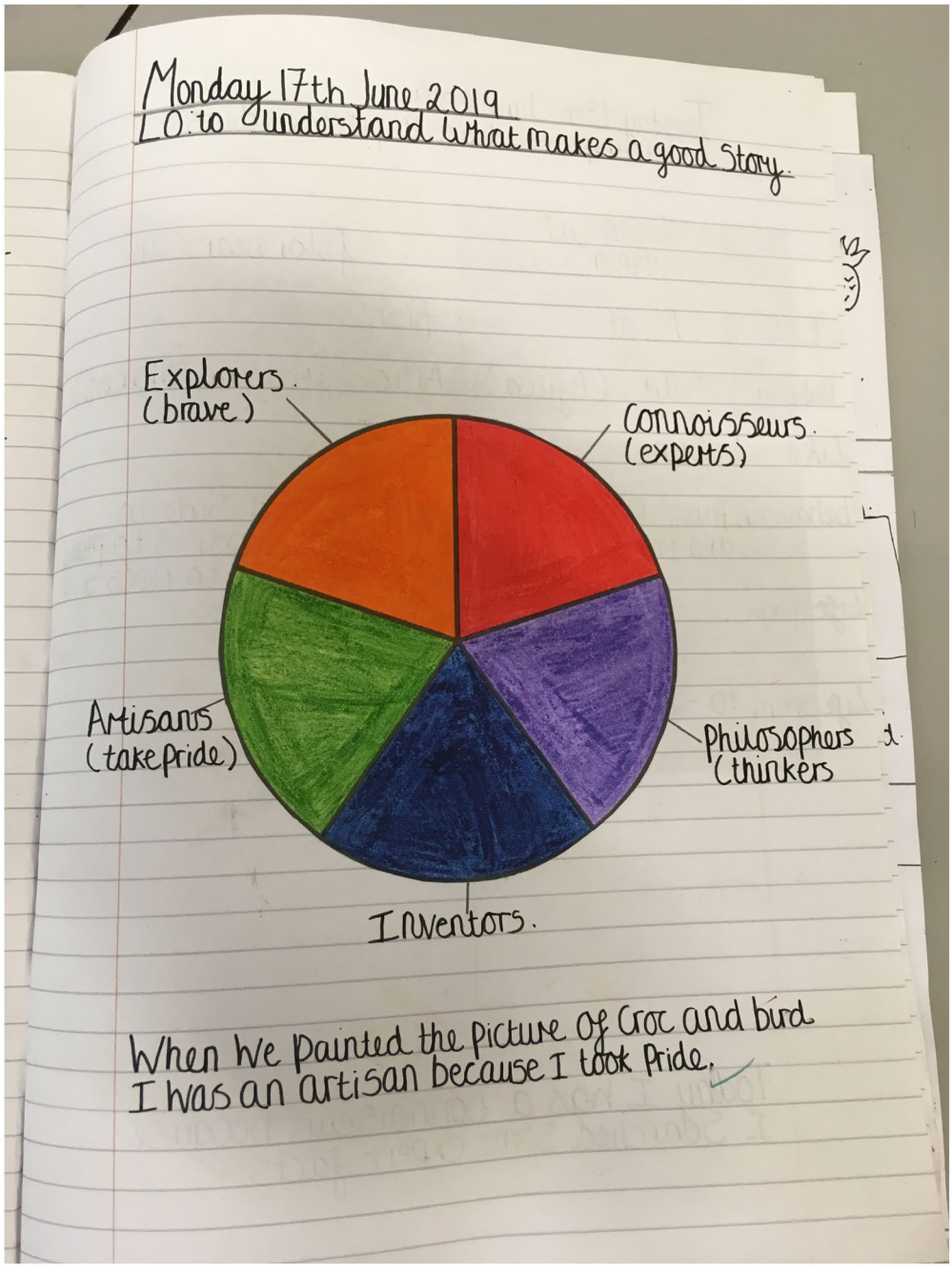
> if you're the philosopher, I want you to think about a new language device that you're going to bring in. Can you make sure that you use similes, metaphors, prophetic fallacy, symbolism, personification, alliteration, ok. Can you bring that in?

Teachers also acknowledged the benefits of the rich vocabulary within the Storymaker Wheel:

> While we're trying to close the vocabulary gap, I think it's wonderful that they're using words like artisan and connoisseur! You will get the same thing, I was thinking a lot, so I'm a philosopher, but I think that's great. At least they know more than they did about what a philosopher is and as they go up, it's vocabulary they're going to encounter, so I think it's great. I'm hoping they're going home and using that to impress their parents (teacher interview, school Y).

One student in school Y, which had just started working with the Wheel, confused artisan and artist.

> if you think you're an artisan and you don't know what it means, you could write 'I'm an artisan' and Miss could look in your book and say well you haven't done any drawing (student, school Y).



(digital photograph of student work, school Y)

Nevertheless, the teacher in school Y was finding ways to encourage the students to expand on their understandings of the different characters.

> You can say to children 'what have you been today?' and they are still quite limited, but they will say 'I've been an inventor because I tried something new, I've been a philosopher because I gave it a lot of thought. But I'd like there to be a bit more of a depth of understanding about that. But that comes down to me going

> over it and for them to understand that these parts of the process are key parts of the process (teacher interview, school Y).

In the example above, the adaptation of the Wheel is teacher-led. The use of the term 'going over' implies a more didactic approach to developing understanding and there is no indication here that the teacher will support pupils to define the Wheel and its dispositions from their own perspectives.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Data gathered to explore the initial ways that teachers and students worked with the Storymaker Wheel in the three schools reveal a disconnect between the underpinning philosophy of the wheel and the creators' intentions for the Wheel, and the ways in which it was embraced within the classroom. The following discussion serves to unpack some of this disconnect and suggest ways in which a similar tool for assessing creative writing might be used in the classroom more effectively.

The issue of assessing creative writing according to the mechanics of grammar is not new, nor is it confined to the curriculum in the UK, as this excerpt from a teachers' guide published in the USA in 1975 demonstrates:

> The zeal which dedicated teachers show in amassing evidence to support the growth their children are attaining in compositional skills can be, if not tempered, dangerous, perhaps even inimical, to a natural development in writing especially to the development of a creative dimension. Some use of behavioral or performance objectives may be appropriate in sharpening the instructional focus. But since spelling, punctuation, capitalization, handwriting, sentence and paragraph conventions are the easiest areas to assess in writing, there is the ever present danger that we may pay them too much homage and, in so doing, subtly communicate to our students that these are the elements which really matter in writing. We should continually remind ourselves that matters such as perception, purpose and integrity of creation are also elements which are of primacy in any act of composition

(Bouillet, 1975, p. 40).

However, it was hoped that the counter-cultural approach to assessment offered by the Storymaker Wheel would spark the creativity of the participating teachers and go some way to quelling the contemporary version of this 'zeal'. In this instance, that was not the case. In addition to the logistical difficulties of implementing the Wheel, outlined above, there are a number of overwhelming factors external to the teachers' own creativity that exert influence over their capacity to embrace a new culture of assessment.

One such factor is the policy landscape within which assessment takes place. Assessment, lying at the core of teaching and learning is central to Ball's 'policy technologies' (2016), a heuristic to explore the effects of 'performativity' within neo-liberal education systems globally and nationally. Ball writes of the technologies of: *markets*—where schools are pitted in competition with each other via rankings and league tables, based on assessment in key subjects; *management*—where student achievement in formal assessments feeds into performance-management discussions with teachers and *performance*—the measuring of which serves to align teacher behaviour with a set of 'quality indicators, while providing the ontological frameworks for teachers to know how to be 'good' teachers (Holloway & Brass, 2018). Critics suggest that these policy technologies not only change what teachers do, but

also, teacher identity—who they are as teachers, as they rely upon the technologies for a sense of professional value and worth (Ball, 2016; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Perryman et al., 2011).

Teacher autonomy (Dove, 2018) and willingness to take risks (Granger & Barnes, 2006) both pedagogic and with the content of what is to be taught are often hostages within these technologies. Teacher adherence to the current approved and accepted ways of framing learning, such as 'growth mindset', and technicalities of sentence and paragraph construction ('use similes, metaphors, alliteration') as easier ways of assessing writing (Bouillet, 1975) was evident. The sense that teachers wanted to be told what to do and how to do it ('having missed the training …I'd be grateful for any resources you might have') as well as tightly regulate their students' work with the Wheel indicated a lack of confidence in their own or their students' autonomy and creative agency. As Dove (2018) notes, it is "difficult to investigate current attitudes and research about student writing without frequent reminders of the lack of autonomy faced by teachers in the current atmosphere of testing and accountability" (Dove, 2018, p. 63).

The lack of confidence in students' autonomy and exclusion from the assessment process is exacerbated by what Pasqua (2017) refers to as a deficit thinking model that effectively penalises learners who do not possess the cultural capital to meet the requirements of formal assessment.

"Deficit thinking positions students who do not possess capital of dominant cultures as lacking … Rejecting deficit thinking includes engaging with students in process writing and valuing individual skills and interests" (Pasqua, 2017, p. 33). The rejection that Pasqua (2017) describes is exactly the aim of the Storymaker Wheel tool—an enabling force that would place learners at the centre of their own progression, regardless of possession of cultural capital. The difficulty teachers experienced in including students raises questions regarding the culture of assessment within which the teachers piloting the Storymaker Wheel have been working. The teachers in the study were seemingly unable to move outside of the formal assessment of creative writing as a function of grammatical correctness. This suggests that the assessment culture is built on a deficit model of attainment.

Drawing on Zipin (2009), Pasqua (2017) goes on to associate deficit models of assessment in creative writing with cultural capital (Bourdieu) and a misrecognition of the writer's (pupil's) habitus, claiming that, 'power-elite cultural capital in the curriculum alienates cultural others; valuing forms of cultural capital over others enhances as well as diminishes student experiences and opportunities' (Pasqua, 2017, p. 33; Zipin, 2009).

The small number of schools doing any meaningful ongoing work with the Wheel (three, out of eleven that initially expressed an interest) is potentially indicative of teachers' struggle to see the relevance of it to their and their students' work, or to see it as a priority amongst other pressures (SATs, time etc.) bearing down upon them. The tone for this was unwittingly set as Zip Zap reduced the Storymaker Wheel launch to teachers from the advised half a day exploratory, reflective, creative workshop, to a fifteen-minute didactic power point presentation. The most exploratory, student-centred and creative ways of working with the Wheel were in school Y, a Pupil Referral Unit, where class sizes were small (approximately twelve students) and expectations of student achievement against mainstream performance measures were low. Here, teachers were already working creatively and in student-centric ways, as their work fits less within the more mainstream pressures of the policy technologies.

CONCLUSION

Our findings, while limited, provide some useful insights into potential obstacles that prevent teachers from engaging wholeheartedly with the ethos of the Storymaker Wheel. Returning to the 1970 s and Bouillet's (1975) exploration of assessment in schools in the USA, the

author offers a possible way out of the policy technologies restraining teachers, without asking them to risk the paradigm shift of assessment counter-cultures. Bouillet (1975) recommends a systematic programme of writing analysis as a solution to the difficulties presented by an over-emphasis on grammar at the cost of creative expression. Bouillet argues that the development of criticality is essential to develop creative written work. However, children only have access to the writing of adults in the form of books, as examples of how to write 'well'. There is no evidence within the text of the process of editing and crafting the writing, so a natural assumption of the child is to believe that all writing should be perfectly formed at the first attempt. A possible solution is to provide children with models of writing produced by children, to analyse, critique, identify examples of good writing, suggest edits and so on (Bouillet, 1975, p. 36) which the Wheel offers to do. Yet the Wheel's offer of self and peer-assessment for creative writing is situated within a wider, pervasive accountability culture as discussed earlier. The data indicates that rather than using the Wheel as a tool to develop different creative writing pedagogies within their classrooms, teachers were instead seeking to find ways to assimilate it to existing assessment frameworks and current education trends ('growth mindset'), privileging form, structure and accuracy, and teacher—led approaches. Ball's arguments about the impact performance technologies have on teachers' identities resonates here, as we noted teachers' reluctance to take risks. It could be argued that the 'docile', 'productive', 'conforming' teacher that Ball and Junemann assert as a product of neoliberal educational ideology (2012, p. 29), is evident here and in tension with the dialogic, iterative, student-centred pedagogies needed for the Wheel to be used in the way it was conceptualised. Bruyère and Pendergrass's work exploring Freirean dialogic pedagogies for encouraging children's 'authoring' (2020), with teacher as 'accompanist', modelling creative writing and allowing messiness within the authoring process offers a glimpse of a classroom environment fertile for the Storymaker Wheel and yet quite alien to those encountered for this research. The Wheel has the potential to be a catalyst for changing creative writing pedagogies, but we believe that the ways in which it is mediated with teachers is important. We noted the perfunctory 15-minute power-point presentation Zip-Zap gave when introducing it and propose a different approach. We suggest that teachers could be encouraged to reflect upon existing assessment practices and the positioning of the Wheel as deliberately counter-culture. They could then be given time, freedom and creative materials to individually explore ways in which they might adapt and refine it to suit their learners, and then collectively share their ideas and interpretations, as per phase two of our research. Our next steps are to explore whether a more creative, dialogic introduction to the Wheel may impact the ways in which it is then developed within the classroom.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ETHICS APPROVAL STATEMENT

Ethical approval for data gathering was received from the University of Nottingham in 2018.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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